THE HONOR OF THE CHURCH

CHARLES R. BROWN

JAN 2 8 1959

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BY

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HONORING THE CHURCH

I

Honoring the Church

IT is considered very good form and very good fun in certain quarters these days to maul the church. It is a chilly day when some light-hearted newspaper reporter does not make merry in a column or two over what he regards as "the faults and failures of the Protestant Church." He is careful not to attack the Roman Catholic Church, for reasons which we all understand full well. And it is a very cold day when some minister, like an ill-bred bird, does not foul his own nest by criticising and even caricaturing the church which originally gave him his opportunity to be heard. In my judgment it is poor business all around. It gives aid and comfort to the enemy. It amuses some, wounds many, and helps none. I wish to protest against it, and to say a word here as straight and as strong as I know how to make it for "the honor of the church."

We have been told in trenchant magazine articles, written by ministers who were old enough to have known better, that if the pastors of the churches had not been "so benignly dumb," — I am quoting here from

an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* — "so hopelessly inefficient," the kingdom of God might have been coming with power and great glory. We are informed that millions of the choicest young men in the land are almost beside themselves "in their eagerness to embrace Christianity," but for some subtle reason, known only to the adept, "they are bristling with hostility" toward the one organization which for nineteen centuries has done more than all other organizations put together to make that Christianity a power in the thought and action of the world. It is all somewhat puzzling to the plain man who walks with his eyes on the stars and his feet on the solid earth.

When I read these slashing criticisms in glowing magazine articles, I always wonder where the essayists have been. My own personal observation of the church in this country has been neither brief nor narrow. I am fifty-nine years old, and I have attended church all my life. I was born in Virginia, grew up and went to college in Iowa, received my theological training in Boston, held three pastorates covering twenty-two years in Ohio, Massachusetts, and California; and for the last eleven years I have been living in Connecticut. And in all that time I have never heard, nor heard of, a minister preaching "a

long evening sermon against the evil of drinking sweet cider," or threatening people with the wrath of God because they wanted to hear Edwin Booth in "Hamlet," or "causing nine-year-old boys to suffer tragic torment because they thought they had committed the unpardonable sin, and so were lost." If these faults which the magazine articles allege against the church were common and characteristic, surely I would have bumped against them sometime, somewhere.

The critics, with great vigor in their literary style, clamor for "courage, self-devotion, fidelity to duty, unconquerable cheer, loyalty, willingness to die for one's cause" — quoting again from another article in the *Atlantic Monthly*. They do well — the idea is altogether sound, though in no sense new. And where are these qualities of courage, devotion, fidelity to duty, and all the rest to be found at their best and in largest measure, not alone under the stimulus of a great war, where of necessity the demand for them will be limited to a brief period, but in the give and take, in the wear and tear, of a whole lifetime?

Here again my observation has not been altogether narrow. For six years I was a member of the Central Labor Council, made

up of the representatives of all the Labor Unions in a large city. It met every Monday night, and during those six years I came to know intimately those men who were striving to better the conditions of their own class. I was a visitor for two years for the Associated Charities in one large city, and for ten years a member of the Board of Directors of the Organized Charities of another city. I have been in close touch with the resident workers of well-known social settlements, East and West, rejoicing in and aiding in the good work they were doing. I have been for eleven years a member of the faculty of Yale University, and during that time I have preached and lectured and given addresses in one hundred and twelve colleges and universities. I know personally large numbers of these men and women who are giving unstintedly of their best to the great work of education.

And as a result of my observation I am ready to maintain against all comers that nowhere on earth is there to be found so large and so constant a measure of self-sacrifice, of Christlike spirit, of unflagging devotion to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, and of patient fidelity to duty on the part of those who walk the ways of common life, as in the church of Jesus Christ.

I will back the pastors and the faithful members of these churches for sheer moral idealism against any group of people which can be brought forward from any other one organization to be found in our American life.

When the great missionary societies, for example, want young men and young women of sound health, trained intelligence, social grace, and Christian integrity, to go forth to all the spiritual frontiers of earth and there display these qualities of " courage, devotion, loyalty, willingness to die for one's cause " during all the working years of their consecrated lives, where do they get them? They get them, of course, from the churches where these young people have been converted, nurtured and furnished with that spiritual impulse which carries them into this chivalrous service. The missionary boards would never think of looking anywhere else for them. This sort of material is not produced anywhere else. It cannot be found in some lovely grass plot of spiritual productiveness lying quite outside of the much-maligned church of Christ.

The social settlement, with all its excellent qualities, if called upon for candidates to swelter on the Congo, or to shiver in Alaska or Labrador, or to face and relieve the dirt and the squalor, the disease and the vice of

the crowded sections of the Orient, or to brave the attacks of Boxers in China, or the horrors of Armenian massacres, would be swift to say, " It is not in me." The labor union would speedily add, " It is not in me." This army of the choicest young people we know, enlisting for a warfare in which there is no discharge, going out to minister to people whose faces they have never seen, whose names they do not know, whose language they cannot as yet speak, but whose needs they have already made their own in warm, unselfish sympathy, comes forth steadily from those churches which have, according to the critics, become " so feeble " — I quote again — " as to have no ethical enthusiasm for anything except negative ideals of individual behavior."

The same sound principle holds in the work of the kingdom here in our own land. I was president for many years of the California Home Missionary Society. It was part of my duty to travel among the wide wheat ranches and the lumber camps and the mining towns of that far-flung state. I have been in the homes and in the churches of the self-denying men and women who are rendering there an honored service as ambassadors of Christ. Their labor lacks something of the romantic picturesqueness which

attaches to the work of those who are in foreign lands with people of alien race; but for heroism, unselfish devotion, patient fidelity, and sympathetic interest in the needs of their fellows, I know of nothing finer in American history than the action of those home missionaries as it bears upon laying the foundations of the Republic on solid rock rather than in fleeting sand. I am confident that the home missionaries of our country would yield as many bushels to the acre of courage, fidelity, loyalty, and willingness to die for their cause as any body of people to be found anywhere.

It is not expedient for me to glory or to think more highly of my fellow Christians than I ought to think. The churches of our day show no celestial perfection. They cannot in the nature of the case be without spot or blemish or wrinkle, or any such thing, so long as they maintain the cheerful habit of receiving human beings into their membership. They are made up of men and women like ourselves, people whose mental and spiritual limitations are instantly apparent. And in almost every church there is given unto us " a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet us," lest we should be exalted above measure. But when the returns are all in, the sheep and the goats

told off and counted up, is not the church of Christ about the divinest thing we have here on earth at the present time? Name any other organization which can spell it down in moral idealism and in useful conduct. It is the one institution we have which is bold enough to accept the social ideal, not piecemeal in specialized lines of effort, but in its entirety. It has the moral courage to look up into the face of the Infinite Perfection of God and say, " Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done here on earth as it is done in heaven."

Have we not had about enough of this wholesale abuse of organized religion? It gives great satisfaction in certain quarters, but they are not the quarters to which the poor world looks for its spiritual help. Might we not take a hint from the ethics of the medical profession? The physicians are not " stabbing each other awake " — I quote again from the *Atlantic Monthly*. They are not bringing discredit on their profession by casting widespread aspersions on their fellow practitioners. In dignified fashion they do sometimes warn the public against the methods of ignorant and unprincipled quacks. But that is not a case in point. The rank and file of the Christian ministry is not made up of quacks. It is upon the regular practi-

tioners that these essayists (themselves oft-times ministers of Christ) are bringing reproach by ill-advised and unjust arraignment of their brother ministers. I commend to their serious consideration the usage which prevails among the apostles of the healing art, so closely akin to our own cure of souls.

Now having made my protest against the thoughtless, reckless impeachment of the honor of the Protestant Church in America, I would like to say three plain words about the church life which we are set to lead. There are churches, alas, which cumber the ground. They are fruitless branches clinging in desperate fashion to the True Vine. It is high time they were either purged or cut off. There are men in the ministry who by reason of their listlessness and inefficiency are actually doing more harm than good.

The young men in the theological schools are to be trained and made more competent as leaders in the church of Christ. The pastors in active service are to show themselves " approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Let them all stand ready to " endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," accepting loyally and gladly all the disciplines, physical and mental, social and spiritual, which may mean added

efficiency. The end they seek is " charity out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and a faith unfeigned," with no sham, pretense or make-believe about it. Let them watch, then, in all things, and make full proof of their power to serve aright the needs of their fellow-beings.

We are to make the church of Christ interesting. Jesus Christ himself is interesting. Lift him up anywhere so that people can see him as he is, and he draws men to him. The gospel he preached is interesting. For spiritual insight and for beauty of form, for strength and delicacy combined, and for sheer human interest, there are no words to be found in print which surpass the words of Him who spake as never man spake.

Religion is interesting. The human soul in its relations to God in that great moral order which enfolds us; the human soul in its relations to other lives in that great social order which enfolds us; the human soul in its high privileges of self-realization through all of those aids, human and divine, which religion offers in the fullness of their power — there is no other single aspect of life which can compare for one moment with all that for interest. In the face of the challenge which all this offers to our best powers at their best, the man who allows his preaching

to become dull, prosy, unappealing, lifeless, ought to be cast out of the synagogue as a heathen man and a publican. He has denied the faith.

When Charles A. Dana was editor of the New York *Sun*, he was a man in a thousand in a newspaper office. He was, as one of his honored associates has said, " a man of scholarly attainments, of inborn refinement, and of supreme ability to transfer his great knowledge to every column of his newspaper." He believed that the newspaper is a great educator, greater as an educator of the masses than the pulpit or the lecture room, because it talks to such a wide audience. He believed that its influence, read as it is by old and young, by boys and girls as well as by men and women, should be thoroughly clean and wholesome. Then on that secure foundation he was intent on building the structure of a paper that people would take and read. " Make the *Sun* interesting," he was forever saying to his staff, " make the *Sun* interesting. The people will not read dull, poky, porous stuff — hoot it out of the place." Let ministers and laymen join hands to make the church interesting, and people will come to it; and what is still more to the purpose, they will be profited by their coming.

Let the church be made vital. We are

not dealing mainly with Rehoboam and Jeroboam, who are safely dead and buried. We are not concerned chiefly with the mummies of Egypt which Moses may have seen when he was an unwilling resident of the Nile Delta. We are dealing with men and women, young men and maidens, boys and girls, who are more or less alive. We are set to make them alive at more points, alive on higher levels, alive in more interesting and worthy ways. We are the servants and followers of Him who said, touching his own fundamental purpose, " I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Whatever else it may or may not be, the church which bears his name must be vital.

We cannot have a congregation of intelligent Twentieth Century Americans on their toes over some skilful defense of a particular mode of baptism or over some particular theory as to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We cannot send " a thrill of life along their keels " or " launch them out into the deep " by warming up some old doctrinal squabble which may have caused men to grow red in the face in the time of Athanasius. We cannot stir them to action by brandishing before their eyes the moral shortcomings of the Hivites or the Girga-

shites. Their reaction to such appeals will never be such as to break out the ends of the pews. But the sorrows and struggles which those people are undergoing now, the duties and temptations which they are facing now, the opportunities and high privileges which lie before them now in this intricate and challenging modern life of ours — all that ennobled, enriched, and glorified by being shot through with the truth and grace of the gospel of the Son of God, will bring them out of their chambers, rejoicing as strong men to run a race. It is of the utmost importance that the activities of the church in its worship and in its work should deal with that which is vital.

Let the church be made religious! This might seem to go without saying. Alas! would that it did! There are churches — you have seen them and I have seen them — which do not by the sort of service they offer make men aware of their souls, aware of God, aware of their high privilege in him and of their capacity to wear increasingly his likeness and image. In those dead-and-alive churches there is not, as men used to say of the service conducted in the city of London by Frederick Denison Maurice, " the sense of something which is not of this world." The whole atmosphere of the place is of the

earth earthy, and the poor attendants at that church seem to be buried in it, beyond the hope of a resurrection.

Let me quote a single paragraph from a recent popular and widely read novel. The man who is speaking is a soldier who has come back from the Great War, wounded and maimed for the rest of his days. He is blurting out to his chum what he feels in the depths of his own soul:

" What the world needs is the old God! Man cannot live by bread alone, the churches tell him; but the man says, ' I am living on bread alone, and I am thriving on it.' Yet away down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul is a hunger and a craving for other food than this earthy stuff. And the churches, instead of reaching down to him what he wants, invite him to dancing, and picture shows, and ' you're a jolly good fellow,' and ' religion is a jolly fine thing and no spoil-sport,' and all that sort of latter-day tendency. Damn it " — I am quoting the soldier and I must use the words he used — " Damn it, the man can get all that outside of the churches and get it better. He wants light. He wants God. The preachers call it ' making religion a living thing in the lives of the people.' ' Lift up your hearts to God,' they say; but there is no God there

that a plain man can understand to be lifted up to."

The church above all else is a place to dispense religion. It is a place of prayer. It is the house of God. It is the gate of heaven. It is the high office of the church through its appointed services of worship to lift men into the sense of kinship with the Eternal, into a feeling of co-operation with their Maker, into the joy of participation in an august spiritual enterprise where God, the Father, is above all and through all and in them all. To know, to do, and to enjoy all this is to be religious.

Let the church be made interesting! Let the church be made vital! Let the church be made religious! The Lord will add daily to that church people who are being saved.

BUILDING THE CHURCH

II

Building the Church

WHEN the Master was here he set lame men on their feet and bade them walk. He opened the eyes of the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, causing men to see and to hear what they had never seen nor heard before. He sometimes fed the hungry. He occasionally gave an address to a crowd in the open air. But his main interest during the last two years of his public ministry is indicated by those familiar words addressed to Peter, " I will build my church."

He was building a church. I do not mean a stone structure with a spire on it — one cannot build a church out of stone, or boards, or bricks. With that material one can only build the building where some church may meet. The church itself is built out of men and women, young men and maidens, boys and girls, who have seen in Christ what Peter saw in him, who have declared their loyalty to him as Peter declared his loyalty, who are undertaking to live in that same high mood. Out of that sort of material and on that foundation, he will build his church.

The Honor of the Church

When I speak of the Master focussing his efforts on the building of a church, I am not thinking of anything intensely ecclesiastical. He had almost nothing to say about polity or ritual or creed statement. When men undertake to discuss those questions which have so often divided Christians into contending groups, they do not find much material for their mighty arguments in the four Gospels. Jesus was bent upon gathering a group of men and women — it was never a very large group in his day — whose minds were saturated with his ideas, whose hearts were steeped in his spirit, who were striving to live the life as he manifested it and imparted it.

He wrote no books; he created no endowments; he led no armies. He never undertook to change the form of government under which his people lived, but he did build a church. Then he stood back, ready to stake the whole future of his cause upon what that church would do and be. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Its influence was to be like leaven permeating the whole lump of human life. It was to go into all the world and disciple the nations, baptizing them into a new spirit.

The Master recognized the plain necessity

for organized effort. One cannot sing an oratorio all by himself, I care not how splendid his voice may be. He must merge his voice in a chorus of voices. One cannot render the Fifth Symphony, or the Ninth, by himself, I care not how well he may play on some single instrument. He must blend his efforts with those of an entire orchestra. The modern achievements in commerce and in manufacture have only been made possible because men have learned to unite their forces and to act together. The same sound principle holds when we come to sing the Lord's song and to do the Lord's work. It can only be done where men and women come together, are agreed, and begin to act in concert as members of the body of Christ.

It might seem as if all that would go without saying. Alas, no! Would that it did! We live at a time when in many quarters organized religion is held in contempt. You will hear light-headed and light-hearted people speak in glowing terms of Jesus Christ, and then with the last half of the same breath speak contemptuously of the church. We are often told in breezy fashion that it does not matter the least bit whether one belongs to the church or not, that it does not matter whether he has been baptized or takes communion, — that on the whole it is rather

better, perhaps, if he has not done any of these things! You will hear young men with some measure of moral aspiration declaring themselves after this fashion: "I want to do good in the world. I want to live a Christian life. But I will not belong to any church. I will not make any professions. You see, I do not want to get my lines crossed. I propose to stand out free and clear, living my own life and doing my own work in my own way."

It might be well to remind all such people that this was not the attitude of Christ himself. The church of his day does not seem to have been so sincere, so well-behaved nor so well stocked with humane impulse as the church of our day, yet he belonged to it. He was a churchman. It was his custom to enter the synagogue on the sabbath. He observed the festivals of the Jewish church. He utilized the opportunities it offered for moral effort. His last act, almost, was to celebrate the Passover with his disciples and to take the bread and wine of a new covenant as a member of the church. He did all this because his life was ruled by judgment and conscience.

We were at war the other day with Germany. Suppose you had met some patriotic young fellow in those days in civilian dress,

but with a gun on his shoulder! Suppose he had told you that he was on his way to France. "But where is your uniform?" you would have asked. "To what company do you belong, to what regiment?" Then he might have answered in this vein of modern individualism, "Oh, I do not belong to any company. I do not wear any uniform. I do not make any professions about being a soldier. You see, I do not want to get my lines crossed. But I love my country and I am on my way to France to see if I cannot pick off a German or two on my own account."

His folly would have made you laugh. No competent government on earth would have allowed him to go. Had he been allowed to go, his unorganized presence there in any considerable numbers would have been a hindrance to the work of the regular troops. The man of sense fights always with the army.

Now we are at war with the evil of the world, and it is no child's play. We see lined up against us not only huge masses of flesh and blood headed wrong; we battle with "principalities and powers, with the rulers of darkness in this world and with spiritual wickedness in high places." The very vagueness of the apostle's language indicated his sense of something mysterious, ominous,

deadly, standing over against us. In the face of all that opposition to the divine purpose, the victory for righteousness cannot be won in any haphazard fashion, each man going his own gait and way. The winning of that victory calls for discipline and concerted effort on the part of all those who believe that the spirit which comes not to be ministered unto but to minister is Lord of life, and that before it every knee should bow. At this very hour the Head of the church is reaching out for members of his body. He would have us belong to him as my hand belongs to me. He is building his church out of such offered material.

The words of the Master emphasize also the value of fellowship in a common task. The Christian does not grow in isolation or in a vacuum. He is a plant which the heavenly Father planted and he is meant to bear fruit. He must of necessity have soil and atmosphere and climate suited to his growth as a plant. The soil where the Christian thrives, the atmosphere which he recognizes as his native air, the climate which best ministers to his unfolding, are all to be found in the fellowship of the Christian church as they are found nowhere else. Here is the house of his habitation, the place where the divine honor dwelleth, the atmosphere of

devotion and the company of those who are wont to call upon his name.

The longer I live and the more closely I study those efforts which really count, the more clearly do I recognize the importance of putting one's life into some institution which will continue when the man himself is gone. The influence of the free-lance is short-lived, I care not how sharp a lance he may have been or what a merry time he may have had for his brief hour upon the stage. The work which will add up large in the Day of Judgment is the work of the man who merges and blends his efforts with the efforts of other men in such a way that something results which is massive, corporate, enduring. The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth becomes the dwelling-place of those forces which are to realize the divine purpose.

" I am doing a great work," a young man once said, " I cannot come down." He was laying bricks. But every brick went into a wall with thousands of other bricks. The wall surrounded a city as its chief defence. The city was Jerusalem, the capital of that race which took the right of the line in the moral leadership of the world for centuries. When we remember that the Jews wrote this book of final values for all who would live

nobly and that the Son of Man was born a Jew in Bethlehem of Judea, we feel that the young man did not overstate it. To lay bricks in the wall of a city like that was a great work.

" I am doing a great work," some man says now. He may be teaching Greek or geometry, but he is building his ideals and principles, his methods and aspirations into the unfolding lives of a whole generation of young people who are just coming into their own. He is making himself an essential part of an institution which is to set its seal upon the life of a nation.

" I am doing a great work," some man says who is striving to transform business into a profession, with its own high standard of ethics, its own worthy objective. He is striving to make his own business a social utility, a place for the expression of goodwill, a local contribution to the solution of that problem of industrial organization which is so vast and so intricate.

" I am doing a great work," some man says in a lonely, struggling little parish in the country. He is preaching sermons, calling upon the sick and making friends with boys and girls. But in doing all this he is strengthening the line of that institution which reaches out into all the cities of the land and

into all the lands of earth seeking to establish the rule of the divine spirit in the lives of men. He has made stronger in its reach and grasp the work of that institution whose influence will continue long after he has been gathered to his fathers.

There is something inspiring in that sense of participation in any far-reaching and august enterprise. I have felt it in many parts of the world touching this interest of public worship. I have listened reverently to the service of the Mass according to the Roman Catholic ritual in St. Peter's at Rome, and I have heard a choir of a hundred men and boys chanting the service of the Greek church in the Cathedral of the Kremlin at Moscow. I have heard the call to prayer from the minarets of the Mosque of St. Sophia in Constantinople and I have watched the faces of devout Jews at the fragment of the old temple enclosure at the Jews' Wailing Place in Jerusalem. I have studied the stolid faces of the Chinese in their joss-houses in old Shanghai, and I have seen the faces of the Buddhist priests as they conducted worship in the great Hongwanji temples in Japan. And although in every case the mode of worship and the language in which it was offered were alien to me, I felt in my own heart a sense of sympathy with it all. There

was in me, as in them, the same feeling of dependence upon a higher Power, the same sense of kinship with the Eternal, the same hunger for a closer relation to the divine Being who can minister to our good. How strange and abnormal I should have felt had I never shared in that hunger of the heart!

How much it means when we stand up as Christians of every type and of all lands, saying to that sordid materialism which is the bane of so much of our modern life, " We believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ his Son our Lord. We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Author and Giver of life which is life indeed "! How much it means when we say in corporate fashion to those petty individuals who are too blind to recognize the value of associated effort, " We believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints "! How much it means when we say to that mode of life which crawls when it might walk in high places with its head up, " We believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting "! And into all this richer experience we enter when we become members of the body of Christ, sharing in the confessions and the worship, in the aspiration and the service of the church of the living God.

Here is the church of Christ also proclaiming those standards which are ultimate and final. " A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." It is a final word. " Ye therefore shall be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect." It is a final word. " Because he lives we shall live also and always." It is a final word. " It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when we see him as he is we shall be like him." The church would have every man wear nothing less than the likeness of the Most High. Its prayer is that we might all be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man. Its supreme interest is character.

Now you will all agree that the sorest need of the world is to be found at this point. In the summer of 1914 the countries in Central Europe had brains enough, wealth enough, brawn enough, to have ushered in the millennium if millenniums ever could be ushered in by those agencies alone. They had enough of huge armanents, of secret diplomacy and of that spirit of competition which is supposed to be " the life of trade." The sad fact was that they did not have character enough, and so what they did usher in was not the millennium but seven long, sad years of perdition, — and the end is not yet. Wise enough,

rich enough, strong enough, but not good enough to do what they ought to have done!

Here at this hour in our own land we have resources enough, man-power enough, organizing administrative ability enough, to cover the country with peace and prosperity as the waters cover the sea. But we have not character enough. We have not enough of the sense of social justice, enough of respect for the rights and interests of the other man and the other class, enough of the spirit of goodwill in which alone our problems can be solved, enough of the sense of obligation to the common good. So in place of peace and prosperity we have unrest and in many quarters unreason, and a spirit steadily at work beneath the surface of our American life which is a menace to the health of the nation. We are not good enough to do what ought to be done.

What an hour for an institution ordained of God to open the eyes of the blind, to cast out the devils of ill-will and to cleanse men from the leprosy of sordid selfishness! These vexed questions can never be solved on the basis of some more skilful form of economic organization or by some clever political device. They can only be solved upon the basis of a finer type of personal character and by the steady expression of a more social habit of mind.

We are all members one of another, whether we like it or not. If one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it. The head, in the great economic order which enfolds us, cannot say to the feet, the highest cannot say to the lowest, nor the lowest to the highest, " We have no need of you." We can only advance and prosper as we advance together. And all this is only a roundabout way of saying what the Master said in so much better language, " This is the first and great commandment, ' Love God with all your heart. And the second is like unto it, Love your neighbor as yourself." On these two hangs all there is.

With all its present limitations I cannot believe that the church is altogether blind to that vision or indifferent to its obligation. Many organizations honored and beloved have done well. They have attacked the evil of the world piecemeal. They have undertaken some single item of human betterment, the outlawing of the open saloon, the better housing of the toilers, better sanitary conditions in the factories, better wages for some group or class, the banishment of organized and profitable vice. All this is good; but the church is the one institution on earth which has had courage enough to stand up and accept the social ideal in its entirety.

It looks up into the face of the perfect God and says, " Thy will be done on earth." It will never cease to offer that prayer nor to hold fast to that high resolve until that sublime end shall have been achieved. And it is able to hold true to that course because it puts first that which is first — it makes character its supreme interest.

In any community there are many common interests. Some of them are social, some industrial, some political and some educational. High up among them stands the church of Christ, pledged to the spiritual interests of the people. It is there to deepen their sense of the presence of God. It is there to uncover for them profounder sources of motive and stimulus, so that the zest and relish of living may not fail when those years come where so many people say, " We have no pleasure in them." It is there to interpret and consecrate all these social contacts which furnish the raw material out of which character is built. It is there to steady and strengthen the common aspiration for that which is just, true, and clean, for that which is honorable, reputable and lovable. It seeks for nothing less than to bring the actions of men " up to the style and manners of the sky."

It is a time for every church to be alive

and alert. " Every branch that beareth not fruit he taketh away." There is neither room nor soil in the garden of God for fruitless lives. " Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth that it may bear more fruit." During the last seven years the nations have been clipped and pruned; they have been purged and sprayed by the searching discipline through which they have passed. Now that " the staleness of those soft, sleek, sordid years of low content " has gone, the hour has struck for a spiritual advance. There is a loud call for a more abundant supply of all those fine fruits of the spirit. And it is the task of the church which the Lord is building afresh in these searching times to increase the yield of fruit on every field of human interest.

It is a sacred task to build a building where some church may meet and minister to the souls of men. When a group of people have thus lodged in brick and stone, in stained glass and carved wood, their abiding concern for the higher life of the community, they have achieved something upon which they may well look back in thoughtful, reverent joy.

But finer still is the high privilege of acting with Him in building the church itself. To have even the humblest part in creating

that body of people who are fitly framed together by a common purpose and are compacted into a sacred fellowship by that which every joint supplieth is the highest sort of privilege. When that great work is in progress we have indeed a building of God, a house not made with hands, a habitation of the Spirit, eternal in the realm of those values which endure.

" Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll,
Leave thy low-vaulted past,
Let each new temple nobler than the last
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea."

BELONGING TO THE CHURCH

III

Belonging to the Church

HOW much is suggested by that easy current phrase, "I belong to the church." My hand belongs to me as a part of my body. It sustains an organic, vital relation to the body and to all the other members of that body. It derives its sustenance from the vital processes operating in the body. It acts in the light of all that stands revealed by the eyes of that body. It enjoys the guidance afforded by the head of the body. It shares in the hurt and loss or in the honor and gain which belong to the body.

In like manner, when "I belong to the church," I become a member of the body of Christ. I belong to him who is the Head of the church. I sustain an organic relation to all the other members of his body. I am cleansed, fed and renewed by the currents of influence which are flowing through the body of Christ. I stand at attention under his eye, ready to execute the commands of my Head. I find myself an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ in all the high privilege and lasting glory which are the portion of his body. What finer thing can be said of

any individual than to assert, in all the fullness of meaning which the phrase denotes, " He belongs to the church."

It was the greatest of the Apostles who maintained that the church is the body of Christ. It is the place where the spirit of Christ resides. When Jesus was here his mind and heart ranged freely across wide areas of human need and up to the final source of our help. But behind and within that face and form, which his friends came to know and to love, his spirit was at home, resident, domiciled, established. Those early Christians saw and felt the glory of the eternal in the face of Jesus Christ. Likewise the church, which is his body, becomes the abiding place for his spirit. Where two or three, where a thousand or ten thousand are gathered together in his name as a true church, there he is in the midst. His spirit is domiciled in his church.

The church is the place where his spirit is best revealed. When Jesus was here on earth, men saw not his spirit — no man hath seen a spirit at any time. But in the bearing and movements of his body, in the deeds done in the body and in the expression on his face, his spirit stood revealed. In these days the spirit of Christ is revealed mainly in the attitude and bearing, in the

deeds, the moods and the utterances of his church.

The church is the main instrument by which Christ works. When Jesus moved along the lanes of Galilee and streets of Jerusalem, the eyes of his body sought out human need, his ears heard and reported the cry for help, his feet bore him upon errands of mercy, and his hand reached out to lift, to heal and to bless. Here again the church as his body becomes the main tool of his achievement. Its members become eyes to see opportunities for service and ears to hear the words of appeal. They become minds to frame and lips to utter the gospel of hope. They become feet to go upon his errands of recovery, and hands, open, outstretched and ungloved in their offer of help.

The church is the converting, transforming agency whereby the raw material of his kingdom is transformed into the living fibre of his body. The body of Jesus took up and assimilated the food offered him in Galilee and in Judea, to transform that substance into forms of energy which spake and loved and lived in that benign presence. The church reaches out and apprehends the proffered material in all those unrenewed lives. It transforms them by the grace given it by the divine indwelling. This ordinary

substance of our common humanity, oftentimes of the earth earthy, is thus changed into finer forms of energy where one may see the kingdom of God coming with power and great glory.

In the face of all the high privilege, ennobling obligations, and exalted usefulness suggested by the Apostle's conception of the true function of organized religion, how much it means to belong to the church! The body is one and hath many members, and all members have not the same office. There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of administration, but the same Lord. There are varieties of operation, but it is the same God who worketh. The head cannot say to the feet, the highest cannot say to the lowest, " I have no need of you." The feeble and inconspicuous are necessary for his complete design, as well as those members upon whom he has bestowed more abundant honor. We suffer or we rejoice together. We halt or we advance as consenting and contributing members of one common endeavour. We, as " members in particular " of the church of the living God, are indeed the body of Christ.

The Greek word in the New Testament translated church means literally " the called out." Called out from a sinful world; called

out from the ranks of the spiritually indifferent; called out from the disorganized mass of more or less aspiring souls! Called out into a way of life which is life indeed, into the path of an ascending and unending service, into a mode of organized spiritual effort, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail " Called to be saints " at last, when this age-long process of self-realization shall finally express and embody the perfect will of God.

The church is differentiated from other useful but less worthy organizations — baseball nines, fire companies, lodges of Elks — by three distinguishing marks. It is made up of those who have been called out by a certain agency, the spirit of God. There is in the church something superhuman. They have been called out for a certain purpose, the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, the sway and rule of the divine Spirit in all our human affairs. And they are people possessed of a certain intent, to live after the spirit and method of Him who is the Head of the church. In their spiritual immaturity the members of the church are for the most part but taking the initial steps in this endeavor, but they must be sincere in their fundamental purpose.

I am a high churchman, in that I would

exalt the importance and value of organized religion. It is not necessary to believe in the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration or in the Real Presence in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper because one would emphasize the value of associated effort in worship and service. We have lost ground as Protestants by minimizing in many of our moods and phrases the value of the church. The Roman Catholic priest urges his people to come to the appointed place of worship, not only at the stated masses on Sunday but for personal devotion on week days, when they offer their prayers. We have more commonly taught our people to believe that it is just as easy to pray in any sort of a place as in the House of Prayer. They have come to believe, many of them, that on the Lord's Day they can " worship God in nature," as they put it in high-sounding phrase, meaning that they spend their Sundays habitually on the golf links or racing about the country in high-priced motor cars. The Roman Catholic has emphasized the power of the stated and customary use of the ordinances of worship. We find happy-go-lucky Protestants who scarcely know what they are. The Roman Catholic has emphasized the value of the sacraments as channels of divine grace. We have sometimes allowed the Communion

service to be so lightly esteemed and so awkwardly celebrated that followers of Christ felt that they could " take it or leave it " as they chose, without in any way affecting the depth and strength of their spiritual lives.

How it lifts a man out of the sense of pettiness in a purely private and apparently insignificant moral performance when he belongs to the church! He gains at once the sense of participating in an august and far-reaching spiritual enterprise. He is now a consenting and a contributing member of that body of Christ whose mighty redemptive ministry is destined at last to fill the earth with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. He feels his own individual will to be good and to do good now heavily reinforced because it is merged and blended with the infinite Good-Will of the living God. He has openly formed an alliance offensive and defensive with One who is out to win, with One who has at his command all the forces needed for a final and glorious victory.

Here was a private soldier in the Great War. He was just one more Thomas Atkins, scarcely to be distinguished from several millions of other men just like him. What kept up his morale? What made him strong to do, to bear, and to resist?

He might be marching wearily toward the

front through rain or sleet. He might be standing guard in one of the myriad trenches, knee-deep in mud and filth. He might be imperiling his life more directly in some listening post out in No Man's Land. He did not know just how the campaign might be going at every point, nor just how far his own bit of courage and fidelity might affect the final outcome.

But he was a unit in a great army made up of just such insignificant units, utterly insignificant if taken apart from the great whole, yet mighty when viewed in a comprehensive way. And he knew that in command of that army and of all the armies there was a man at Headquarters named Foch, who did know how the campaign was going. He knew that at Headquarters there was a man in command of all those diverse forces and that he was directing them with intelligence and purpose. He, as a private soldier, might or might not come back alive, but the army would persist. His knowledge of this associated effort made him feel sure that ultimate victory was certain. His faith in Headquarters and in the total strength of the army to which he belonged made him strong. As one of those private soldiers in our own American army said in my hearing, " We did not know much of the time where we were going

or what we were doing, but one thing we did know, and that was we would beat them."

Hear, then, my parable! Here I stand in some out-of-the-way spot in the great world's life! I see the forces of evil everywhere, active, potent, and threatening. I am not wise enough to know just how the battle is going at every point. I am not wise enough to know just how far my own bit of courage and fidelity, my own prayer and self-sacrifice may count in the final result. But I am fighting with the army of the Lord of hosts. I feel all the while that at Headquarters there is One who does know all this and infinitely more. I know that at Headquarters there is One who is directing these forces, seen and unseen, with intelligent purpose. He has at his command energies adequate for a glorious victory. When I am baffled or depressed I can still feel that if I will but do my own bit of duty in my own small sector of the moral field, I can leave the final result with him. And that sense of participation in a vast spiritual enterprise with the army and with him keeps up my morale. The very fact that " I belong to the church " of the living God makes me strong to do, to bear, and to resist.

In thinking, then, of the church and of the obligations of church membership, of the

activities and of the interests of some local church, it is good to think one's way on through to that which is fundamental and ultimate. Do not stop at the little way stations along the road your mind will traverse, offering your conscience small excuses and trivial evasions of duty; go right on up to the end of the line When you thank God for your daily bread and for all your other mercies and privileges, do not stop with the bread. Keep straight on until you are face to face with the Giver of all good gifts, the Author and Director of all the forces which make for good.

" For back of the loaf is the snowy flour;
And back of the flour, the mill;
And back of the mill, the wheat and the shower
And the sun and the Father's Will."

RECRUITING THE CHURCH

IV

Recruiting the Church

THE care of a parish means a great deal more than taking good care of the church members turned over to the minister by his predecessor in the pastoral office. It was a meager ideal which a preacher once announced when he said that his idea of success was " to keep the pews full and a smile on the treasurer's face." He might easily have achieved that end and still have had upon his hands a church as lifeless as Lazarus was when the Master came.

The process of elimination goes forward steadily in the visible body of Christ as in every other organism. There are removals by transfer to other parishes and there are removals by the hand of death. There are inroads from the world, the flesh, and the devil which rob the church of some of its members. Guard against this process as best we may, losses will occur. The prudent business man is compelled each year to " write off " a certain percentage for " the depreciation of the plant." And in a less

material but no less real way, so must the man who deals with values of a higher sort.

This process of depletion is to be matched and over-matched by the process of replenishing. Unless the church is growing, it is dying. The wise mother weighs her baby every week. If there is no increase in weight she knows that there is something wrong. The enlistment of new members in the church stands, therefore, in the very forefront of interest. We may emphasize the importance of "applied Christianity" in our social, industrial and political life, but, if we are to have that applied Christianity, we must take steps to have an adequate, substantial and constantly growing supply of Christianity to be applied. Lincoln used to say, "If I am to be President of the United States, I must see to it first of all that there is a United States to be President of."

There is a keen zest attached to the work of recruiting members which no other section of Christian activity can show in equal measure. It is carrying the war into the enemy's country and winning victories over him out of hand. It has the high significance which must ever attach to the inducing of self-determining lives to change their final allegiance. It develops in those who undertake it a deeper consecration, that they may feel

themselves in some measure worthy to make their appeals as ambassadors of Christ to those whom they would see reconciled to God. The recruiting of the church has in it all the chivalry of Christian service at its best.

The very difficulty of it offers an effective challenge to the powers of every one who undertakes it, be he minister or layman. It is comparatively easy to stand up, safely barricaded by a high pulpit and by the sacred conventions of a public service, at a safe distance from the publicans and sinners, and bombard them with texts and with well-phrased appeals for them to undertake the Christian life. It is quite another thing to come down to the ordinary level of every-day life and meet them at arm's length, man to man, and there seek to induce them to make Christian duty their supreme choice in life. It is calculated to induce humility in the most cocksure man who ever ascended the pulpit stairs. Dealing with people where they can talk back, seeking to awaken the indifferent, to win the hostile, and to infuse new purpose into the reluctant, sends a man to his Bible and to his knees to renew his strength by waiting upon the source of all strength.

The work of recruiting members keeps the heart of the church warm and its life strong. You may set it down as an assured fact that

the church which is evangelistic in spirit and purpose is not falling to pieces from dry-rot or spiritual coldness. The very process of drawing in from the fringes of its influence those who are not far from the kingdom of God but still on the outer edge of Christian life keeps the heart and center of the church close knit and compact.

The unceasing effort of a faithful minister to bring others to Christ attaches his own people to him as nothing else will do. The Christian woman who sees her pastor intent upon inducing her husband to become a Christian, or seeking to win her boys to Christian living, does not care two straws whether or not he calls upon her at frequent intervals to drink tea and hear about the health of her canary birds. She sees that he is about his Master's business, and she likes him amazingly for this harder task he is seeking to accomplish.

The high and dry Pharisees twitted the disciples upon the fact that their Master ate with publicans and sinners. He replied with those Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Lost Boy, which will be known and loved when the critics have been buried in oblivion beyond the hope of any sort of resurrection. He also remarked with delicate but effective irony that he was a physi-

cian and that his business, therefore, was mainly with the sick. " They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." How delicious it was ! " Whole," indeed — when they were stretched out at full length on beds of wrong-doing, unable to lift their hands or their heads to the furtherance of righteousness. " Not the righteous " — when he knew, and they knew, and all who heard him knew, that those supercilious faultfinders were at the longest remove from being " righteous"! There was, as a matter of cold fact, more hope for the publicans and harlots than there was for them. It was the glory of his life to go forth and enlist in the high task of bringing in the kingdom of God, those who had made moral failure. And in heaven there was more joy over the repentance of one such than there was over all the prudent performances of those who esteemed themselves too good to need repentance.

The one who undertakes to recruit the membership of the church will naturally keep his purpose clearly in mind and actually in sight. " Fishers of men " — he is not there just to pass the time of day with the fish or to show them he is not afraid of deep water because he, too, has learned to swim.

He is there to catch them if he can and enlist them in a finer mode of life. He counts that wise and warm spirit of evangelism as the crowning asset on his trial balance as it is in the make-up of any minister of Christ.

This high task of winning others furnishes the most wholesome exercise available for the membership of the church. If they would " grow in grace," let them do as the early Christians did. When Andrew had found the Messiah, he at once found his brother Simon and brought him to Christ. Philip found the Messiah and then promptly found Nathaniel and brought him. And each " next man " passed it on to some other " next." So the Christian movement grew by the immediate contagion of life upon life.

Once, and only once, do we read that the One who was known as " a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief " actually " exulted in spirit." It was not in the hour when he stood on the mount of the Transfiguration, his face shining like the sun in its strength. It was not when he stood on the Horns of Hattin uttering the Sermon on the Mount, to go echoing its way down the ages with its serene message of help. It was not when he rode along the streets of his capital city, receiving the popular acclaim and having hosannas showered upon him as a King who

came in the name of the Lord. It was in the hour when " the other seventy " unordained and unnamed disciples returned with an encouraging report as to what they had been accomplishing by the power of the truth he had given them. " In that hour Jesus exulted in spirit " and cried out that he had seen " Satan falling like lightning from heaven." The success of those modest disciples in winning their fellows to a new allegiance became to him an earnest of the glorious consummation when every knee should bow and every tongue confess that his mode of life had the right to rule in the lives of men.

In the best sense every service of the church may be made evangelistic. This does not mean that on every such occasion the minister will undertake to declare the whole plan of salvation, or that he will in set terms urge upon his hearers repentance for sin, and saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It does not mean that at every service he will ask people to stand up, or to raise their hands, to sign cards, or to come forward for prayers. But every rightly ordered service may be so conducted that in its steady outreach, it will be urging upon the minds and conscience of all who come the naturalness, the reasonableness and the winsomeness of the Christian life. It will hold before their gaze the

high privilege and the sacred obligation of Christian living in such a way as to be moving them steadily in that general direction.

When a man falls from the top of a ten-story building, the power of gravitation manifests itself in one way. The body of the man comes to the pavement in the twinkling of an eye, and when it strikes the result is tragic. The power of gravitation manifests itself no less truly but in a very different way in its steady pull upon the Muir glacier, causing it to move only a few feet perhaps in the course of a year. One's whole ministry and the entire work of the Christian church may likewise exercise a steady pull upon the lives of men, drawing them into the Kingdom, in ways less showy and dramatic, but more effective oftentimes than the striking efforts of some notable and noisy evangelistic campaign.

When the work of recruiting is restricted to a special series of meetings or to one particular season of the year, many people will be missed. Like the Jews of old, they will not be in the right mood at that particular season to know the time of their visitation or to recognize the fact that the kingdom of God has come nigh unto them. In a rural church near my father's home in Iowa, a young man was once converted in the month

of July. It was much remarked upon, and one of my father's neighbors made the observation: " I hear that Theodore Craven was converted over at Zion Baptist Church last Sunday night. I never heard before of a man getting religion in July." He felt that " getting religion " was something like raising watermelons. It could only be done at a certain season. " The tree of life," however, bore her fruit of ministering to human need " every month, " and the very " leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Any service and every service may well be saving in the spirit it maintains and in the atmosphere it creates. " Today, if you will hear his voice. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation."

Every service may be clearing up intellectual difficulties and replacing mistaken conceptions with a more valid interpretation of the eternal verities. Every service may be shedding light upon those moral confusions where some people think that they are not good enough to join the church, and others feel that they are so good already as to need no more vital relation to the spiritual forces at work in the society where they stand. Every service may be lifting up and revealing Him who is able to draw all men unto him if they can only be brought to see him

as he is. The compelling vision of the living Christ will awaken an impulse to be " like him " which will determine the issue. Every service may be paving the way for that supreme and final decision which carries the soul from darkness into light, to go no more out.

In this work of recruiting the church, I would name as the first, the best and the most effective method, the method of personal evangelism. There was one occasion in the Early Church, the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were added to the church. But they were already " devout men from every nation under heaven " — devout enough to have made the long journey up to Jerusalem to participate in that great festival of the Jewish church. In their case it was a theological rather than a moral conversion. They kept straight on as "devout men," only now they had enrolled themselves under the leadership of Jesus as the Messiah. There was one such day that men might hope and pray for the exceptional outpouring of the divine spirit, but only one, lest the church should entrust its entire life to these wholesale efforts.

" The good shepherd calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out." He was able to call them by name because he had

put himself in close personal relations with each one. It was that intimate touch which made his call effective. The drag-net takes of every kind and all at once, but the results are mixed. When the inevitable sorting out has taken place upon the shore, there must be entered up a substantial and disheartening discount of the first impression made as to the success of the effort, by an actual appraisal of the net result. The hook-and-line method is slower and surer when the final returns are all in.

In my own ministry I find in looking over my parish records that those years when I made the most calls and talked personally with the largest number of individuals were the years which showed the largest number of people added to the church on confession of faith. This might not hold true in every man's ministry the country over. I am glad to believe that many ministers have proven themselves better harvesters of spiritual results than I have been. Even so, the method of personal evangelism has so much to say for itself as to outclass and outlast all rival methods.

Hand-picked fruit keeps better through the long winter than does the fruit which was shaken from the tree and picked up from the ground. Hand-picked converts have

a way of holding out and of being found in their places five years later to an extent not always to be realized among those who were brought in by the more miscellaneous effort of shaking the tree in a mighty, monster aggregation attempt at the wholesale evangelism of an entire city.

Fewer sensitive souls are hurt and repelled by the quiet method of evangelism than is likely to be the case where the rough-and-ready methods of a professional evangelist are imposed upon the community. When the work is done in this apostolic way, Andrew finding Peter, and Philip making himself responsible for Nathaniel, the taste of the people is not coarsened and vitiated, which is a common result of those bizarre methods of some evangelists which are deemed imperative for the hasty filling of a huge tabernacle with a crowd eager for another thrill.

In the less showy method of evangelism there will commonly be less of the loose and dogmatic statement carelessly but often successfully employed for the sake of some immediate effect and leaving some ugly problems for the patient pastors who stand by to pick up the fragments which remain. The ethical teaching put forth by settled pastors and by faithful laymen in their work of recruiting is likely to be better balanced,

and the Biblical interpretation is apt to be more competent, than is the case when fervent and dramatic exhorters, lacking both the thorough training and the cultural background for such a sacred undertaking, come swiftly upon the scene for a brief and inconclusive effort.

We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that in the last twenty-five years the educational forces in this country have been gaining steadily upon the ecclesiastical forces. We recognize this gain in the larger amounts of money which they are able to secure from thoughtful people for the prosecution of their work; in the larger hold they have obtained upon the popular esteem, and in the number and quality of the young men and women they can enlist in their service. These educational forces have emphasized " the process " rather than " the crisis." They have rested their entire weight upon the value of the slow, steady, well-considered process, rather than upon the jerks and spurts of some showy crisis. In the light of their experience in making this splendid gain, we may well believe that the way of Christian nurture in its best and broadest sense, the way of pastoral and personal evangelism, is " the more excellent way." If the churches had been steadily doing their best along these

lines, the demand for those other swifter but less worthy methods might never have arisen. Why not do this great work in the best way — that is, in Christ's way?

ADAPTING THE CHURCH

V

Adapting the Church

THE form of church life in the matter of polity, of worship, of activity had best spring from a careful survey and an intelligent recognition of the needs of the field where the church is doing its work. We shall find along that line a surer guide to spiritual effectiveness than in any sort of blind reliance upon some preconceived notion of what the church should be and do.

It may be that the early churches described in the Book of Acts were congregational in their polity. I use the term not in any sectarian sense, but merely as indicating that simplest and most democratic form of government adopted by several branches of the church of Christ. It is my own personal belief that those early churches were congregational. But this is not a matter of large significance. If a church governed by elders like the Presbyterian Church, or a church governed by bishops like the Episcopal and the Methodist Churches, or a church governed by a pope like the Roman Catholic Church, shows itself better suited to serve the

spiritual interest of a community, a state, or a nation, as determined by years of instructive experience, then it would have high warrant for claiming the divine sanction upon its particular kind of polity.

The church, whatever its form of organization may be, is never to be regarded as an end in itself. The church is just a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit, to be employed in the establishing of the kingdom of God on earth. The tool must of necessity be shaped with reference to the work to be done. It is pathetic always to see some ecclesiastic expend his time and strength in forging, polishing and sharpening his tool according to some dogmatic conception of his own, without ever asking himself in any definite way what he is to do with it. The man of sense does not whet his scythe all day — he cuts grass. The wise pastor is not merely intent upon keeping the wheels of his ecclesiastic machine polished and turning — his eyes and his mind are upon some worthy product fit for the garners of the Lord.

In appraising the usefulness of any church the idea of usefulness cannot be conceived in any narrow sense. The long-drawn-out discussion as to the respective value of " institutional " and " inspirational " churches has been in the main a waste of words and a

beating of the air. It is so easy and so futile to claim that the first type of church is "practical" and the other type only "theoretical." The church which has evening classes, men's clubs and boys' clubs, a gymnasium and a swimming pool, a sewing school and a day nursery, and all the other activities belonging to full-orbed institutional religious effort, is sometimes put down as "a practical, useful, serving church." But there may be a community where no one of these forms of activity is "indicated," as the physicians say in their careful diagnosis. The church which receives into its doors on Sunday morning a congregation of men and women, young men and maidens, hardened, coarsened, disheartened, paganized by a week of rough contact with the world, the flesh, and the devil, and by its appointed services sends them back to their homes and to their toil renewed and enriched, ennobled and sweetened, ready to take up all their tasks with fresh zest and relish and do them better, carrying on serenely — that church has done something intensely practical.

The church which takes a company of cold, hard, proud, self-satisfied people and humbles them, softens them, leads them to become as little children in their Father's house, has done a great piece of work. The

church which takes a set of rigid, uncompromising individuals, who pride themselves on standing each one on his own two feet, neither asking nor giving odds, who are saying by their mood and bearing, if not in so many words, " Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost " — the church which takes them and produces within them by years of patient, heroic effort the social habit of mind and the readiness to fix their hearts upon social ideals as the only worthy object of spiritual aspiration, has given a good account of itself. The church which in the course of a winter converts one strong young man from a life of wrong-doing or of spiritual indifference to a life of sustained and conscientious Christian effort has written its name on the walls of the City of God. It has paid for itself for all time. It may well reap royalties of spiritual satisfaction during all the rest of its history from the splendid service of that man who was there brought out of darkness into light.

The power-house does not move about the city in a hurried, restless desire to be " useful." It does not carry laborers to the factories, merchants to their stores, children to their schools, or worshipers to the church. The power-house stands there in stolid fashion, some would say, upon its own appointed

plot of ground, leaving all these practical lines of usefulness untouched. But it furnishes power to the street-cars as they carry people about the streets. The church which is steadily recruiting the supply of Christian impulse in the community, so that moral dynamic flows evenly, steadily, and strongly along all the wires which stretch out through the life of the community, is rendering a service unspeakably precious to the higher life of that city. Inspiration is usefulness.

There are churches which would do well to adapt their activities to the situations where they find themselves. Some churches are dying because of their unwillingness to readjust their methods to the task at hand. They could learn useful lessons from the study of biology. There was a time, we are told, when the highest forms of life here on earth were water-breathing marine animals with fins and gills. It may easily have been that some of these forms of life found themselves stranded on the beach by some unusually high tide, or that some of them in an ill-calculated spurt of energy may have flopped out of the stream upon the bank.

Now there were three courses open to them in the unusual situation where they found themselves. First, they could give up and die because the environment was strange

and difficult. Second, they could try to flop back into the stream or into some adjoining pool, or wait for another high-tide to restore them to an environment with which they were familiar. Third, they could enter upon a desperate struggle for readjustment, many of them dying in the attempt, perhaps, and thus finally learn how to live under these changed conditions. By a long process of adaptation the fins became flippers and then the flippers became legs; the gills became lungs, breathing air instead of water, and there emerged upon the scene a new form of air-breathing land animal able to make its way on solid ground.

However accurate or inaccurate in detail this brief account of the evolutionary process may be, it will serve as an illustration. Here is a down-town city church The removal of the substantial families which once filled its pews has left it in a difficult situation. The new environment of stores, tenement houses and apartment hotels, with their transient population, threatens its very existence. It, too, may sell its property to some moving-picture enterprise, and die — this is always a simple, easy solution of the problem, if indeed it be a solution. It may, on the other hand, sell its property and flop off into the suburbs and build there a new place

of worship in the sort of environment to which it was accustomed in the early decades of its history. It may explain its change of base by the fact that " so many foreigners had moved in " and (as is often the case) ease its conscience by taking up more generous offerings for missionary work. It is sometimes easier to deal with foreigners religiously at the end of a long pole, and if the pole is seven or eight thousand miles long, all the better.

Or, as the last and best alternative, that church may readjust its organs and its functions by heroic effort and painful self-sacrifice, and thus learn to live a new life under these changed conditions. This effort may involve a severe struggle and a great many bad half-hours, but where it succeeds it will mean also the emergence upon the scene of a higher form of church life.

Here was the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City! There was a time when its pews were filled from the pulpit to the front door with people of wealth, of culture, of social position. But there came a shifting of the centers of wealth and of the higher social activities. Madison Avenue was no longer " The Avenue." The plain people, who live in thick layers like a chocolate cake, came surging up the East Side

with their swarming tenement houses. Within three or four blocks of this Madison Avenue Church there was to be found the most thickly populated section of New York City. This church did not die and it did not sell out and move to an easier environment. It stayed right there in its appointed place and on its job from the rising of the sun on Sunday morning to the going down of the same on Saturday night.

It has had for years a gifted pastor, a man who came from a New York family of wealth and social position, one who received his college training at Yale and his theological training at Edinboro, a man who believes that the ideal church is to be found where the rich and the poor meet together on the basis of Christian democracy and the Lord is the maker of them all. This church abolished its pew system as a hindrance to Christian democracy and instituted free seats. It has, along with a few trained and gifted singers to lead the several parts, a large chorus choir of voluntary singers selected from its own congregation. The people of large means and wide culture count it their joy and privilege to furnish a generous measure of the sinews of war and a large share of the talent for leadership; but all the people give according to the measure of their ability,

that the supply may be full. The senior pastor has a staff of devoted men and women co-operating with him in the varied ministries of the church and in the activities of the parish. The Sunday school reaches out a warm hand, open, ungloved, inviting, to the children of all sorts and conditions, that they may come in, assuring them that " of such is the Kingdom". In the absence of the pastor I once supplied the pulpit of that church on a rainy, windy Sunday in mid-winter, and there were ten hundred and eighty persons present in the Sunday school that day, boys and girls, young men and maidens, men and women, studying that Word which makes us wise unto salvation and furnishes us thoroughly for all good work.

The church has built a large parish house next door, eleven stories high, with all manner of well-appointed rooms, for its constant and varied ministry to human need. This parish house has, as its crowning feature, a roof garden where outdoor services are held on hot summer nights, the worshipers lifted up from the dust and heat of the noisy street into the upper air of high privilege and looking out upon a horizon bounded by nothing nearer than the stars and the being of God. This Madison Avenue Church is alive to its finger-tips. The vigor and promise of its

work causes many men to thank God and take courage.

The demand for adaptation in some country church may be no less exacting. The conditions in rural life have changed less rapidly, perhaps, but no less decisively. The telephones which are ringing everywhere, the rural mail delivery, the swift flight of the automobile which has replaced the old reliance upon the slow movements of Dobbin, have made country life another thing altogether. My father was a farmer for more than fifty years in the state of Iowa. He lived two hundred and fifty miles west of Chicago and five miles from the nearest railroad. In former days we got the mail, if the roads were not too bad, on an average about once a week. For the last twenty years of his life the Chicago morning paper was delivered at my father's front gate at eleven o'clock. The people all but universally are taking and reading daily papers and magazines; they have entered into wider contact with the world's life. The rural church which once satisfied them satisfies them no more.

The church in the country has a clear chance to point the way to more wholesome forms of recreation in communities where there is little or nothing for the diversion of

young people between the public dance hall, with its undesirable associations, or the " movies," with many a questionable film, and the Christian Endeavor prayer-meeting. " It is written," not in the Bible but in the equally authoritative book of life, that young people shall not live by sermons and prayer-meetings alone. They live by all the great words which proceed from the purposes of God.

The social life of the church is no mere incidental. " The Son of Man came eating and drinking " — he was intensely social in his habit and method. He began his public ministry at a wedding, and when the refreshments gave out he helped his hosts to get some more. He did it so successfully that the general feeling among the guests was that they had never tasted such joy before. The most prominent and sacred article of furniture in the church is a table, the place where we find things to eat and to drink. The Master would have social interest cultivated and consecrated as a means of grace. He would make the fellowship of old and young nothing less than sacramental in its higher possibilities. The function of the rural church is not to stand aloof, consuming its zeal in scolding and denouncing the less wholesome methods of social contact —

it is there to point the way and to lead in the direction of more wholesome means of social contact.

The rural church may well provide, in its own appointed services and by its co-operation with other agencies, a larger measure of intellectual stimulus. The summer Chautauqua, a child of the church, which owes its wider introduction to the co-operation of the Christian churches, brings a season of privilege to thirsty areas of our American life. The well-to-do farmers here and there are moved to unite in providing endowments for lecture courses which shall bring each winter to the community some of the best minds of the nation. This action has been prompted mainly by the influence of the church. In those communities which are not blessed with public libraries, the organizing of book clubs and magazine clubs which are located in and administered by the church brings wholesome material before the eyes of the many when they have finished their day's toil in the fields.

The rural church which allies itself with the extension work of the State University and brings within the reach of its people instructive and stimulating lectures and conferences on better methods of agriculture and horticulture, better methods of dairying, of poultry

raising and of home management, stands in the apostolic succession which reaches back to the One who went about doing good in all the ways he could. It may well adopt for its motto his own words, " I am among you as one who serves." His service reached all the way from the healing of an unsightly leper to the utterance of the words of eternal life; from the opening of the eyes of the blind to the manifestation of the glory he had with the Father before the world was; from the washing of the feet of those tired disciples to the redemption of a sinful race by his own blood.

The church was made for man, and not man for the church. It was made for that part of the man which most suffers neglect elsewhere. It need not, it had best not, duplicate lines of effort which are already in successful operation through other agencies. It must be sure that the activities upon which it enters are calculated to meet real needs. The sensible people speedily draw away from that which is merely perfunctory. It is never worth while to hold meetings just for the sake of holding them, or for the sake of keeping up certain religious gestures which can no longer be called means of grace, just because " we always have." The best program for the life of a local church springs

from a careful and intelligent survey of the needs of the community, of the other agencies at work to meet those needs, and of the resources available for meeting those needs in some generous and satisfying manner. And wherever the church life is thus adapted to the demands of the environment it may well become the crowning glory of all human institutions.

The true church may well aspire to an imperial place in the life of the community. The Roman Catholic Church was right in its purpose but, as we believe, mistaken in its method. It undertook by its own official authority to crown kings and to control education, and by its confessional to stretch forth the hand of authority into all the most intimate relations of our common life. Let the true church strive, not by the method of lordship and dominion, but by the pathway of leadership and service, to make the spiritual interest in our total life indeed supreme.

UNIFYING THE CHURCH

VI

Unifying the Church

THE minister preaches to a congregation, but, if he knows what he is about, he builds a church. The congregation may have only one, and that a fleeting, interest, the desire to hear a certain gifted man talk or a silver-tongued choir sing. When the service is ended, all sense of unity in the mere congregation vanishes. There is no more cohesion than would be found among the men who go to a baseball game or who sit for a few hours as fellow passengers in the railroad train. Alas for the poor parson who has merely gathered a congregation.

There are eloquent men in the pulpit who never advance from congregation-gatherers to become builders of churches. The preacher may be a sensationalist and the people assemble for the sake of a new thrill. He may be a clever lecturer on current events, and the people come for some more skilful appraisal and interpretation of the news of the week than would be found in the ordinary daily paper. He may be gifted in striking resound-

ing blows on behalf of certain social reforms, and the people interested along those particular lines gather for the immediate feeling of assurance which his utterance will occasion.

In a large American city with which I was familiar there was a certain popular preacher whose congregations were always good. His church was full. When he resigned he had been preaching in that church for ten years to crowds of interested and admiring people. The Sunday following his resignation was a beautiful day in the springtime. The pulpit of that church was supplied by one of the ablest ministers in the state. And by actual count the congregation in the morning numbered fifty-seven and in the evening fifty-three. It was made up of that faithful nucleus of devoted people who are the final dependence and hope of any Christian church. This was all the former pastor had to show for his ten years of work, so far as numbers went. This was what he was able to turn over to his successor. It had been a personal following, with little or none of that spiritual cohesion which belongs to the true church.

We had a dramatic illustration of the difference between a church and a congregation some years ago in the City of Brooklyn. T. DeWitt Talmadge and Theodore Cuyler were both Presbyterian ministers.

They worked under the same polity, declared their allegiance to the same creed and preached in the same city. Talmadge preached habitually to a large congregation. The pews of the great auditorium were almost uniformly full. But when he resigned at the end of a long pastorate, the church did not have sufficient vitality to continue its work or even to maintain its existence. The church was disbanded and the property sold and the organization came to an end. It was the testimony of other pastors in the City of Brooklyn that no appreciable additions were made to their churches at that time by the transfer of members from the disbanded church. The Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, where Theodore Cuyler had been engaged in constructive Christian work for many years, abides to this hour in strength, in devotion, in generous service, and in splendid promise for the future. One of the men had gathered a congregation and the other had built a church.

It is not enough to develop in a body of people the spirit of adhesion to an attractive preacher. It is not enough to develop the spirit of personal loyalty to Him who is the Head of all the churches. There must come also the sense of cohesion as fellow

members of the body of Christ. The necessity for a warm, intelligent, close-knit and effective fellowship is instantly apparent when we study the marks of a true church.

How this truth is emphasized and illuminated in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which is the outstanding classic on the doctrine of the church in our Holy Scriptures! The church is an organism, and there is to be found in all of its members that common unifying principle which gives it stability and strength. Now the apostle approaches that central truth from one angle and now from another, working it over under varied figures of speech.

Now he phrases his truth in terms of biology. The church is a body, the body of Christ, the residing place of his spirit, the revealing place of his divine nature, the instrument and agent of his holy will, as he dwells within it for the accomplishment of his good pleasure.

Now he phrases his truth in political terms. He addresses the members of that church in Ephesus as citizens in the kingdom of God. " Ye were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel!" Strangers from the covenant of promise! Ye were outsiders, not under the flag, without God and without hope in the world! But now " ye are no

more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints."

Now he phrases his truth in terms of architecture. Ye are builded into a holy temple in the Lord, fitly framed together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part. "Ye are built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone," as a permanent habitation of God through the Spirit. Every stone as a consenting member of the structure was mortared in by the sense of fellowship and held in position by the pressure of the entire wall.

Now he phrases the same truth in terms taken from vocational life. " Ye are called," he says, " in one hope of your calling." He beseeches them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. He recognizes the presence of a great variety of gifts — some men are best suited to be prophets and some apostles, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. But they are all called " in one hope " of their common calling for the perfecting of human life, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until all shall come, in the unity of the spirit and in a growing knowledge of the Son of God, unto the

stature of perfect manhood, according to the fulness of Christ.

Now in a yet more intimate way he likens the fellowship of the church to the spirit of the home. "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named." Here the unifying principle is a common love of all for each and of each for all. He would have them strengthened with might by the spirit of Christ in the inner man. He would have Christ dwell in their hearts by faith. He would have them so rooted and grounded in the practice of good-will that they would ultimately comprehend the length and the breadth, the height and the depth of that divine love which passeth knowledge and be filled with all the fulness of God.

How far this apostolic conception of the church stands above the temporary aggregation in some miscellaneous crowd which can be readily gathered to hear some clever man talk or some sweet-voiced singer sing! This superficial assembling of ourselves together may have some slight value — it is better than nothing at all; it is better than having these people spend the entire day appointed for worship in hurried, thoughtless, social dissipation or in unseemly forms of

recreation, but it stops far short of a true church.

This sense of intelligent and affectionate cohesion which belongs to the church is made its distinctive mark. " By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples," not that you all declare your acceptance of a certain system of theological belief; not that you have all been baptized in some particular way; not that you all observe some stated form of liturgy; not that you all are governed by one particular form of polity. All these tokens of Christian life have a certain value, but they are all secondary. " By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." It was remarked of the early church, " How these Christians love one another." The church which lacks this fine sense of fellowship is unable to stand in the true succession of the church of Christ.

It must be a comprehensive fellowship. The *esprit de corps* becomes an ugly thing where it is employed to cement more closely the men and women of a single social class. If the church should be used to promote and intensify class feeling it would be profaned. This would be equally true whether the particular class which took over the church was rich or poor, cultured or simple, high or low in its social status. The rich and poor

had best meet together, not as the givers and receivers of alms, but as the children of one Father in the house of their God. The employers and the wage-earners need the sense of spiritual contact as they meet together around one table to eat the bread and drink the wine of remembrance, as they meet to pledge their loyalty to him in mutual love and respect for one another. The people who are well endowed, well-trained intellectually and the unprivileged, untaught many have a mutual ministry to render to one another. It will be good for the college professor to come to closer grips with men who earn their bread by the work of their hands. It will be good for the toilers to enrich their lives by contact with trained minds. It was a joy at St. George's Church in downtown New York when Seth Low, the President of Columbia University, was teaching from Sunday to Sunday a large Bible Class made up exclusively of men who wrought with their hands.

The fellowship of the church may well be comprehensive in a theological sense. It is unfortunate where all the extreme conservatives flock off by themselves and become all the more tense and rigid in their conservatism by their lack of other association. It is equally unhappy where all the more liberal

and more progressive minds in a religious community take French leave of those who have the deeper sense of values already gained — they are likely to become self-conscious and heady in their new views. Where the motive which impels men to enter the church is kept deep and strong, the door of entrance may be kept wide open, so far as theological conformity goes. The unity of the church is to be found in the last analysis in " the unity of the spirit " rather than in any precise agreement touching the details of our interpretation of those eternal verities which are confessedly too vast for any sort of final statement.

It was my good fortune once to serve a church where two of the deacons stood poles apart in their theological opinions. They were noble men and they have both gone to their reward, so that I venture to give their names. Edwards C. Williams was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, and was named for the great Jonathan Edwards. He was more orthodox and conservative on the whole than was the famous theologian whose name he bore. He was no ignorant narrow-minded dogmatist. He knew what he believed and why he believed it, and was prepared to give a reason for the faith that was in him to anyone who asked, and to give it in clear-cut

terms. He read the best books. He took the trouble to learn the Greek language after he was fifty years old so that he might read his New Testament in the original and combat his pastor's heresies, if such there should be, on something like equal terms. His sturdy righteousness was like a sample of some old Hebrew prophet brought down to date.

Wallace W. Lovejoy was a poet and a dreamer who had been a theological professor in his earlier life. He was a man of deep and lovely piety, but he lived in the clouds. Even when he spoke in prayer-meeting his utterance was sometimes puzzling to the uninitiated. The people listened with affectionate interest, for, while they did not always understand what he was talking about, they felt so sure that he understood it all that they were happy. He was almost, if not altogether, a Unitarian in his estimate of the person of Christ and in other theological positions which he held with great tenacity. But the stated invitation to the communion service in that church, which bade " all those who love Our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth " to come to the Lord's table, took in both deacons alike and they came with equal loyalty to Christ in their hearts and with genuine love and respect for each other. And as they passed up and down

the aisles of the same church with the bread and the wine of remembrance, the people received the sacrament from their hands with gratitude and satisfaction, thanking God for the presence among them of Edwards C. Williams and of Wallace W. Lovejoy.

It always reminded me of a scene in one of Ian Maclaren's stories where a rigid Scotch elder and a young minister fresh from the University of Edinboro had fallen out over the doctrine which was being preached from the pulpit of the little kirk. The young dominie had much to say about " Semitic environment " and the latest conclusions of the " higher criticism," while the elder sat back in sturdy anxiety lest the Ark of the Covenant should be upset by unholy hands and the Ten Commandments all spilled out. They argued it out one night at great length, keeping nothing back for fear or for conscience' sake. They were both too thoroughly Scotch to abate one jot or one tittle of their convictions, and the discussion, which lasted until midnight, brought them nowhere. But before they separated they clasped hands in honest affection and engaged together in a season of prayer. And when they were on their knees before their Maker it was noticed that the only difference in their prayers was that the young man prayed that they might

keep the faith once delivered to the saints, and the old man prayed that the Spirit of Truth might lead them into all truth.

Doctrinal discussion and personal preference in the matter of ritual and polity may divide us, but we all come together in prayer and praise. Here is a hymn-book where the saints and the singers of all ages and of all churches have lifted up their hearts to the one God and Father of us all in grateful worship. Here in a single hymnal in constant use in almost any one of our churches are " Blest be the Tie that Binds " and " I Need Thee Every Hour," written by Baptists! Here are " Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty " and " The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ Our Lord," written by Episcopalians! Here are " Love Divine All Love Excelling " and " Jesus Lover of My Soul," written by a Methodist! Here are " Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus " and " I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say, Come Unto Me and Rest," written by Presbyterians! Here are " Lead, Kindly Light " and " Jerusalem, the Golden," written by Roman Catholics! Here are " A Mighty Fortress is Our God " and " Now Thank we all Our God," written by Lutherans! Here are " Nearer, My God, to Thee " and " In The Cross of Christ I Glory," written by Uni-

tarians! Here are " My Faith Looks Up to Thee " and " O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee," written by Congregationalists!

Why should it not be so? All things are ours, whether Paul or Apollos or Peter; whether John Calvin or John Wesley or Adoniram Judson; whether Jonathan Edwards or Alexander Campbell or William Ellery Channing; whether Francis of Assisi or the Archbishop of Canterbury or General William Booth. All are ours, for we are Christ's and so were they, every man of them. Ours to know, ours to revere, and ours to love.

The sense of fellowship in any single church may well extend far beyond the boundaries of that immediate parish. Let it include the past history of that local church, the sweet memories of the noble men and women who have lived in it and loved it in days gone by. Let it gather up into itself the recollection of the crises through which the church has passed, the great sacrifices which have been made on its behalf in times of stress, the varied and heroic service it has been privileged to render to the interests of the Kingdom. I have been told that in the Old South Church, Boston, there is a family whose ancestors have worshiped in that church for seven generations. Their

sense of high privilege and their joy in their church relations reaches far beyond all that they receive from the ministrations of its gifted and devoted pastor. The Lord has set their feet in a large place.

The sense of fellowship must include all the distinctive values contributed to our total Christianity by the particular denomination in which it stands. Let every section of the church of Christ write its own Eleventh Chapter of Hebrews! If it cannot quite bring forward from its own roll of membership honored names which will match up with those of Abraham and Moses, it can surely offer many which will average up better than Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthath, as they have wrought righteousness, subdued kingdoms and put to flight the armies of evil. Let there be written and cherished a book of remembrance touching those who, in one particular part of the vineyard of our Lord, " thought upon his name " and gave a good account of themselves in the use they made of the abilities with which he had entrusted them.

The sense of fellowship must in its farthest reaches include the Holy Church Universal. It all belongs to us wherever we may find ourselves, if we are indeed members of the body of Christ. We are joint heirs in all

the rich heritage which has come down through the history and achievements of the whole church of the living God. It is good to get that sense of a vaster fellowship in the common worship of all the members of the body of Christ. It will not destroy the loyalty of men to their own particular group, but it will lift them out of the narrowness of a petty sectarianism into the feeling of participation in an august spiritual enterprise. " Let the people praise thee, O God. Let all the people praise thee!" Let them rejoice in their common fellowship in the Holy Church Universal, in the communion of saints.

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